

RPG Reload File 025 – ‘Dragon Fantasy Book 1’

[February 12, 2015](#) by [Shaun Musgrave](#)



Hello, gentle readers, and welcome to the **RPG Reload**, the weekly feature where some of us may be losing our hair, but we certainly aren't losing our thirst for adventure. Each week, we dive into the bountiful past of App Store offerings, looking for previously-released RPGs that we can pull out and get reacquainted with. It's a chance to take a deeper dive on games that we may have already reviewed in the past, and a sort of check-up to see how those games are getting on these days. I try to present a fairly balanced schedule that represents the broad spectrum of RPGs out there, but I need your help to make sure I'm not missing anything. Each month, the readers have a chance to select the game I'll be writing about. Hey, *you're* a reader! If you'd like to vote, simply head on down to the comments, pop into the [Official RPG Reload Club thread](#) in the forums, or tweet me at [@RPGReload](#) with your selection. The next reader's choice article is coming up in the first week of March, so get your vote in as soon as possible!



It's hard to believe it looking at the App Store now, but it wasn't so long ago that there were no actual *Dragon Quest* games on iOS. The series has always had an inconsistent relationship with the world outside of its home country, so it was hardly an unusual state of affairs. However small its economic power might be from installment to installment, however, there's no questioning *Dragon Quest* ([\\$2.99](#))'s influence on RPG fans, especially those of the NES generation. Little RPG fans grow up to be big RPG adults, some of whom decide to make games of their own, and so it is that wherever you can find indie games, you will find games inspired by *Dragon Quest* to varying degrees. For a long time on iOS, the best way you could scratch that itch was Muteki Corporation's *Dragon Fantasy*, or as it's now known in these heady post-sequel days, *Dragon Fantasy Book 1* ([\\$7.99](#)).

According to [an interview conducted by Kotaku back in 2012](#), *Dragon Fantasy* began its life as *Talisman*, one of those pie-in-the-sky teenage dream projects that typically don't come even close to fruition. A young Adam Rippon and his friend Bryan Sawler, both fans of video games who wanted to make their own someday, began teaching themselves the skills they needed to make their game project come to life. *Talisman* had many of

the markings of the age of its creators. Characters were openly based on people they knew in real life, with one of the main characters even named after Rippon's father. Like most of the wild ambitions we all have in our adolescence, *Talisman* kept getting shoved to the side by the realities of life. Rippon and Sawler were busy doing work for big companies like Electronic Arts, and it was simply more practical to build careers than to work on an RPG conjured up in junior high school. By necessity, reality often shoves dreams off the desk.



It's less common for reality to pick those dreams back up and encourage them, but that's just what happened to *Talisman*. In December of 2010, Rippon's father passed away. When his father's next birthday came around, Rippon made the decision to honor his father's memory by attempting to finish the game with the character bearing his name. He trimmed the game down to a manageable scope, refocused the story around the character based on his father, and began working on it in his spare time. Sawler soon found out what he was up to, and the two of them spent the better part of the next half year putting the game together. It likely didn't seem like the sort of thing that would further their careers in the game industry, but some

things trump practicality. After a lot of hard work, *Dragon Fantasy* released on the App Store on August 24th, 2011. The response from iOS gamers wasn't without criticism, but people were generally impressed by the game's authenticity to classic JRPGs and its charming sense of humor.

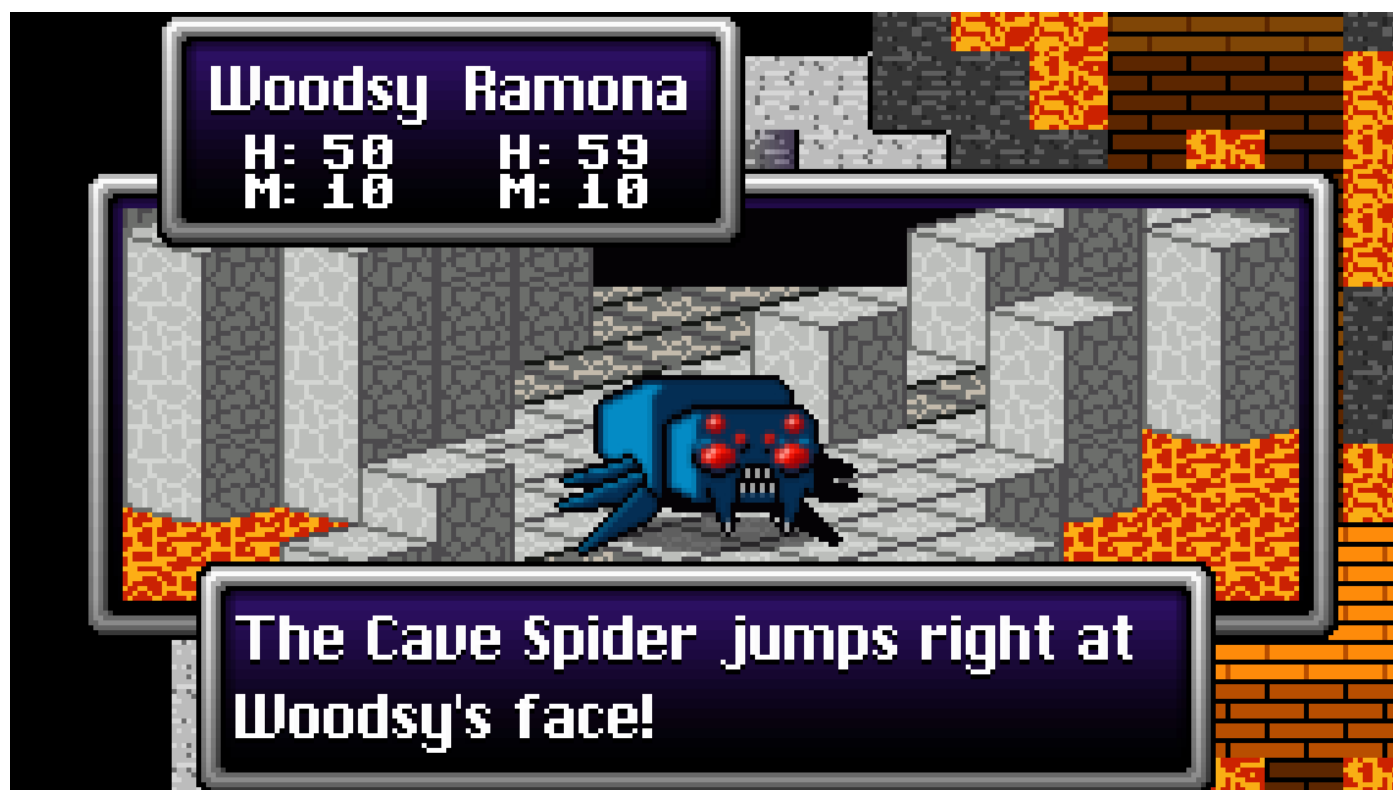
The initial release centered around Ogden Thomas, a very unlikely protagonist. When he was a teenager, he was basically the stereotypical JRPG hero. He killed all the dragons and saved the princess, just like Erdrick's progeny in *Dragon Quest*. We usually don't see what happens to those heroes after the game ends, however. In Ogden's case, the princess he saved became the queen, and she naturally gave Ogden a position as captain of the guards. It's a comfortable position, perhaps too comfortable. The game opens 30 years after Ogden's heroic deeds. He's a 46 year old man whose hairline is losing one battle while his gut seems to be winning another. Things have been peaceful in the realm, leaving Ogden without much to do other than retrieve cats from trees. He's out of shape and thoroughly domesticated. So it was likely to be for the rest of his days, except for the appearance of a Dark Knight, who comes through a portal to the castle and steals away the heir to the throne of Wester. Ogden dives through the portal in pursuit, setting him off on his next epic journey.



Ogden's adventure, and the engine built for it, show clear inspiration from *Dragon Quest 1*. He fights alone against individual enemies using his equally strong skills at physical combat and sorcery. As in *Dragon Quest*, Ogden's quest revolves around locating pieces of a long-past hero's equipment in order to defeat the big bad. There are a handful of towns to visit, a fairly small list of gear to collect, and some tough bosses. It even uses the same mechanic as *Dragon Quest* if you fall in battle. You'll be sent back to your last save point with all of your experience points and items intact and half of your gold gone. It's one of my preferred systems for RPGs like this, so I'm happy to see someone else use it. One area where it doesn't take after *Dragon Quest 1*, or at least as we knew it in English at the time, is in its writing. Almost every indie RPG tries really hard to be funny, but *Dragon Fantasy* actually *is* funny. Sure, it's cribbing from *Earthbound*'s style, but it genuinely feels like whoever wrote the dialogue understood why *Earthbound* is funny instead of simply aping it because it's cool.

Ogden's story is also similar to the first *Dragon Quest* in length, running about 5 or 6 hours. When you reach the end of the chapter, you'll find that Ogden's journey is not over by any measure, but that's a story for the sequel.

That's not the end of *Book 1*, however, as Muteki Corporation provided a few more chapters as free updates over the course of the following year. Each of the two extra main chapters run parallel to Ogden's story, while the third is an odd little intermission with some interesting gameplay quirks. The first addition told the story of Prince Anders, who was shoved into the castle at the beginning of Ogden's story when the Dark Knight discovered he wasn't the heir to the throne. Ogden runs into him later in his chapter, but there's no clue how he ended up there at that point. That story is told in this chapter, along with a lot of other interesting background information.



From a gameplay standpoint, the big addition with Anders' Story is the ability to have more than one member in your party. Anders is a squishy mage type, so he's supported in his escape from the castle by a soldier named Chest Manstrong. Chest will eventually leave you, but if you search around, you can find the mulleted mercenary Serpent Diablo to join your crew. A later update gave you the ability to recruit two extra members at the guild in Wester, Punchy and Casty. You'll still only ever face one enemy at a time, though, so this chapter in particular is pretty easy on the whole, especially if you take Punchy and Casty with you. It's also relatively brief, with only a couple of

mandatory dungeons to explore. There are a couple of interesting secrets to find if you look around carefully, and it at least leaves Anders in position to join up with Ogden at the end of his chapter. It's pretty fun story to plow through and the additional characters open up the combat system quite a bit, even if you don't need it here.

The next chapter, Jerald's Story, further improves on combat by allowing multiple enemies at one time, bringing the battle system in line with that of *Dragon Quest 2* ([\\$4.99](#)). The main characters this time are a thief named Jerald and his kunoichi niece, Ramona. They're trying to get out of the desert area of Sandheim, but they need to buy passports to do it, and they don't come cheaply. What else is a thief to do but to rob, cheat, and steal his way to his goal? This chapter is more open-ended than the previous ones, and it's also a lot more difficult. The overall goal of accumulating wealth to complete the chapter calls to mind Torneko's memorable turn in *Dragon Quest 4* ([\\$14.99](#)), though Jerald comes by his fortunes less honestly. It serves a similar purpose, however, making for a nice change of pace and some unique mechanics. For example, if you approach a townspeople while their back is turned to you, you might be able to lift some coins from their pockets. Just be careful you don't try that stunt on a guard.



Jerald's an interesting character, the sort of lovable rogue that steals the show in many an RPG. Unlike the heroes of the other chapters, he's actually afforded something of a proper arc. He also has access to thief skills, allowing him to steal from enemies and pull off other interesting tricks. I always enjoy thieves in RPGs since they give you incentive to approach combat from another angle besides destroying everything as quickly as possible. Ramona serves her part well, too, becoming quite the little powerhouse over the course of the tale. It's another relatively short chapter, though longer than that of Prince Anders, and in my opinion, more interesting. At the very least, you're covering completely new ground until the very end, where it finally hooks into the endings of the other two chapters. With these three chapters finished, the canon of *Book 1* is closed.

That doesn't mean there isn't time for some non-canon fun, however. The fourth and final chapter of *Book 1* is Intermission M, an officially-sanctioned Minecraft ([\\$6.99](#)) crossover. Yes, a story-based *Minecraft* game, and it was available three years ago. Take *that*, Telltale! Since it has no actual bearing on the story, this chapter has a lot of fun. The boat that Ogden, the Woodsman, Prince Anders, and Ramona are traveling on crashes into a

mysterious island. Ogden's arm is broken, and Anders is hopelessly drunk off of Pirate Soda, so the Woodsman takes the lead role here, assisted by Ramona. They stumble into a Testificate Village where they meet the Player, Freyaheart. The village is in a serious bind and she needs your help. The creator, Notch, has lost his Magic Swedish Hat, and Freyaheart has already broken all of her diamond armor trying to get it back. She turns to Woodsman and Ramona to save the day.



Ramona plays similarly to her incarnation in Jerald's Story, but the Woodsman introduces a new mechanic. He can catch monsters, prompting them to join the party and fight alongside of you. You'll need to capture some strong monsters if you want to overtake the deadly creature that stole Notch's hat, but simply filling out your party isn't quite good enough. The Woodsman will also need some top-grade gear, and in a *Minecraft* world, that means he has to craft it himself. You'll find an axe in an early chest that allows you to gather materials. You can use those materials at a crafting bench to make new weapons and armor for the Woodsman. Settle for nothing less than the finest diamond gear, friends, because the boss of the chapter can really wallop you if you don't have it. This is a very short chapter,

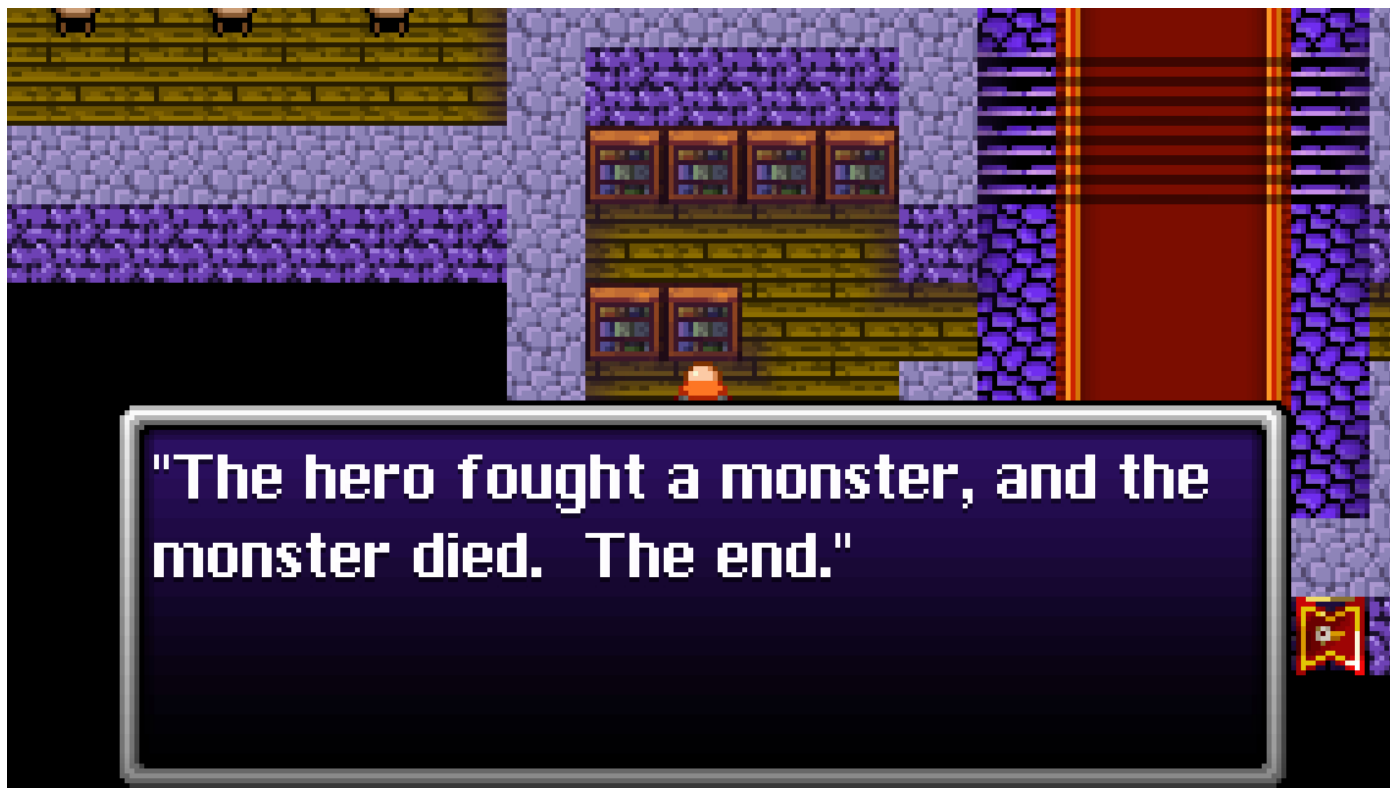
with just a single dungeon and town, but since it's billing itself as an intermission, it's not exactly misleading you about its length. Though it's just a brief non-canon side-trip, Intermission M is a lot of fun, and probably the funniest part of *Book 1* all-around. The ending in particular makes me chuckle every time.

Intermission M was delivered in February of 2012. A couple more updates followed in the next few months, but they were just bug fixes and optimization, along with the added companions to the Anders chapter. The remaining planned chapters were moved to a sequel, eventually titled *Dragon Fantasy Book 2*, but iOS gamers are still waiting patiently for that one. Instead, it was announced for initial release on Sony's PlayStation Network, partly owing to the assistance of SCEA's Pub Fund, a program where Sony offers financial assistance for developers who want to bring their titles to Sony platforms. While this ultimately resulted in mobile fans having to wait, it's probably a good thing in the long run. It gave Muteki Corporation extra money to work on the game, resulting in something better than it was likely to be on its own. The other benefit came courtesy of *Dragon Fantasy Book 1*'s PlayStation port.



Released in April of 2013, this special version of the game was conceived as Super NES-style enhanced remake. The graphics were redrawn, giving them more color depth and adding a few extra layers here and there, and the music was given a similar 16-bit overhaul. If you happened to prefer the classic graphics or music, you could independently switch between the old and the new for either. There were also significant improvements to the way your inventory works, allowing you to stack items for easier browsing. A new optional dungeon was added to Anders' Story, the Tower of Trials, giving you a mid-step between the early areas and the last dungeon. All of this was delivered in a free update to the iOS version in October 2013, not long after the release of *Dragon Fantasy Book 2* on PlayStation.

That's where the game is at for now. While it doesn't have support for things like MFi controllers and newer screen sizes, it's still had a lot of love shown to it through updates, and I'm certain it hasn't seen its last. Muteki is currently working on a Nintendo 3DS version of the game with numerous improvements, some of which are only appropriate for a two-screen device, but others which would fit the mobile versions just fine. After the 3DS version, they'll likely be working on porting *Book 2* around, and I can't imagine iOS not being at the top of that list. Sadly, just as it started, work on *Dragon Fantasy* is something the members of Muteki Corporation can only do in their spare time. In the end, it wasn't very practical after all, but I can't imagine there are many regrets about bringing Ogden Thomas's biggest adventure to life.



Overall, *Dragon Fantasy Book 1* is a fast-paced, funny RPG that calls to mind the first four chapters of *Dragon Quest 4*. Part of how it achieves that quick pace is by being a fairly short game, with most people likely to complete an initial playthrough of every chapter in ten to twelve hours even with a bit of grinding in Ogden's Story. The PSN release brought with it a price increase across all platforms, putting *Dragon Fantasy* in the mid-tier range alongside other games like *Shin Megami Tensei* ([\\$7.99](#)), *Final Fantasy* ([\\$7.99](#)), *Dragon Quest 3* ([\\$9.99](#)), and regularly-priced Kemco RPGs. It's a competitive pack, but *Dragon Fantasy* hangs somewhere in the middle of that crowd, quality-wise. Its straight-forward nature, enjoyable writing, and authenticity to the era of games to which it's paying homage make it a pleasant and easy experience for the mobile RPG fan looking for lighter fare.

That's my take on *Dragon Fantasy Book 1*. I want to know what you think of the game, though. This one got a lot of love in our forums back in the day, but I sense people felt a bit jilted by its shift to PlayStation and the admittedly long wait for a port of the sequel. At any rate, please leave a comment below, drop by the [Official RPG Reload Club thread](#), or tweet me at [@RPGReload](#) to share your thoughts on *Dragon Fantasy*. Also, don't forget

to check out the first episode of the [RPG Reload Podcast](#), where Eric Ford and I discuss *Final Fantasy Tactics* ([\\$13.99](#)). It's a bit rough, but I hope you enjoy it anyway! As for me, I'll be back next week with another RPG from the App Store's past. As always, thanks for reading!

Next Week's Reload Hint: *It's like saying 'V' in French.*